WSAG March 16, 1971 (minutes attached)

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

INFORMATION

March 16, 1971

TOP SECRET
CONTAINS CODEWORD

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Colonel Kennedy

SUBJECT: Laotian Logistics and the Intelligence Community

At today's meeting, Director Helms will be prepared to brief and Lt. Gen. Bennett will be ready to discuss the following points:

-- enemy supply activity and throughput during this dry season;

-- assessments which have been made of supply movements to date and the anticipated results for the whole dry season;

-- any disagreements on interpretation of data;

-- any differences in assessments, specifically defining the nature of such differences and why they exist.

Director Helms and Lt. Gen. Bennett were to have consulted with each other prior to this meeting in order that their differences could be clearly defined for the benefit of the WSAG principles. Director Helms and Lt. Gen. Bennett will have key analysts at the meeting. Ray Cline and his key analysts will also attend.

25X1

The Problem

In brief, the problem arises from the apparent contradiction between CIA's view that "the ammunition and weapons that nightly move down the Ho Chi Minh Trail seem adequate for maintaining a hot war in Indochina" (page 10, para.12, CIA memo "The Ho Chi Minh Trail", Tab A), and DIA's position that "the throughput of supplies this year is significantly below the level achieved this time last year." (para. 3, DIA Intelligence Appraisal, Tab B).

[redacted] 25X1

-- CIA says it has a "large amount of indirect evidence suggesting that this year's tonnages (into the Ban Bac area) will be higher (than last year's) (page 10, para 24, Tab A), while DIA states that it has "no evidence to support" CIA's claim (para 3, Tab B).

Key Questions

-- How much material has the enemy sent from north of Tchepone to areas south of Tchepone since the initiation of operation LAMSON 719?

-- How much of his original goal does this constitute?

-- How much of the total moved through the Tchepone area is believed to be throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia?

-- Has the operation substantially cut the amount of throughput thus far?

-- How much of the input is being consumed by the enemy forces in southern Laos? . . . The real question is whether the continued shipments south through the system are being diverted largely for support of enemy forces in south Laos (they have increased by 30,000 over last year). . . or whether the bulk is still moving south to base areas intended to support operations in South Vietnam.

[redacted] 25X1

-- What did CIA mean by "hot war" in its assertion that the ammunition and weapons that nightly move down the trail seem adequate for maintaining a hot war? (Is it implied that the enemy capability to keep up his attacks in South Vietnam and Cambodia will be as great as last year, less or more? If the answer is that his capability is the same or greater, how do we account for his ability to offset the loss of Sihanoukville and the effects of LAMSON and last year's supplies lost in Cambodia?

-- Can the enemy fully offset the interdiction of Rt. 914 and Rt. 92 by greater use of Rt. 23?

-- During the rainy season, is it possible for the enemy to move enough supplies to make up for any shortfall he may experience during the dry season?

-- Ask both Director Helms and Lt. Gen. Bennett to explain the methodologies used by their respective agencies in assessing the level of enemy logistics flow through Laos.

Talking points follow -
Wayne Smith's analysis is at Tab "Analysis

TOP SECRET

Dr. Kissinger's Talking Points for
the WSAG Meeting
March 16, 1971

1. Purpose of this meeting is to clarify the facts on the South Laos logistics situation.

2. I understand CIA has a briefing to get things underway.

3. Because of the complexity of this issue, can we order our discussion today by starting with the question of inputs, then examine throughput estimates, and finally layout the criteria that will allow us to assess the significance of the data.

4. Input: I understand there is agreement that the input levels of this year are roughly equivalent to those for the same time period a year ago. What we need to know is:

-- What has the input been by time period (week, month) this year?

-- How do these estimates differ according to whether they derive from sensors, intercepts, etc.?

-- What is the CIA and DIA assessment of the reliability of these various sources of intelligence both separately and together?

-- How does the input data look when broken out by pre-Lam Son, Lam Son and post-Lam Son time periods?

TOP SECRET

-- How do the input flows described compare with those for a similar period last year and in earlier years?

5. Throughput: I have seen a throughput series from DIA which shows that throughput into South Vietnam and Cambodia thus far this year is running at roughly 22% of last year's throughput:

-- Where do these estimates come from?

-- What is the CIA and DIA assessment of their reliability?

-- What do other pieces of data tell us about the credibility of such a data series?

(a)How much is the enemy losing to our air interdiction effort, particularly the AC-130s?

(b) How much of these input supplies are consumed by the enemy's vastly increasing force structure in South Laos?

(c) What does the mix of the logistics flow (ammo, POL, food, etc.) this year compared with last year tell us about the proportion of the supplies that are intended to be final combat consumables in South Vietnam or Cambodia?

A review of this data juxtaposed with our assessment of the reliability of the throughput series itself would allow us to make an intelligent judgment about what is getting through.

I also wonder if it is possible to piece together a sub-series of input/throughput data from particular Binh Trams, for example BT32 and BT 34.

6. Output vs. Requirements: What's really important is not how this year compares with last year in terms of throughput but what level of activity this year's throughput will support. It is not terribly enlightening to be told that the throughput will support a "hot war" unless one is told what a hot war is. We need to establish:

-- What the loss of Sihanoukville implies about the additional throughput requirement to support combat operations in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

-- the relationship between various levels of enemy combat activities in South Vietnam and Cambodia and the logistic throughput requirements necessary to support such activities. Let's do an analysis of the requirements for (a) protracted war, (b)a One-MR or Cambodian offensive, (c) Two-MR offensive, and (d) a general offensive of the Tet 1968 variety.

7. Partial Logistics Disruption: It may be that we are painting ourselves into a corner by stressing too much the aggregate supply issues. General Abrams has placed great stress on the role of Lam Son in disrupting the logistics flow into MRs 1 and 2. What is the evidence on this score?

8. Other Issues: Another way to assess the South Laos operation would be in terms of its force diversion/destruction effects. On this score we need:

-- an estimate of those units that were heading to Cambodia or South Vietnam but which were diverted to cope with ARVN in South Laos,

-- evidence on a planned enemy offensive in MR 1, 2 or in Cambodia this dry season,

-- evidence on the total casualties inflicted by ARVN in South Laos and on enemy units put out of action by the Lam Son operation.

We also need an estimate of the additional NVA deployments to South Laos caused by Lam Son.

9. Can the intelligence community do an assessment along the lines we have described, stating clearly differences of view and provide such a report within a week or ten days?

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET

INFORMATION
March 16, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: K. Wayne Smith KWS

SUBJECT: Logistics and Force Diversion/Destruction Evidence on South Laos

Problem

CIA has provided its estimate of the current logistics situation in South Laos and you have received DIA's rebuttal.

CIA maintains that:

-- "There is a large amount of indirect evidence suggesting that this year's tonnages will be higher [than last year's]." CIA cites the 108 ton per day average of 1970 versus the 140 ton average through just one of three passes in 1971. CIA surmises that if we had data on the inputs through the other two passes, input could run as high as 400 tons per day if one assumed proportional flows. Another intercept reports possibly 165 tons per day arriving shipped from BT32, which according to CIA is "the highest ever noted in enemy logistical traffic for a month." Other indirect evidence cited are reports from various Binh Trams that they have repeatedly exceeded their quotas.

-- After adding to previous supply flows the increment required to replace the lost Sihanoukville flow (estimated rather glibly by CIA at 20 tons per day) CIA says "Thus the ammunition and weapons that nightly move down the Ho Chi Minh trail seem adequate for maintaining a hot war in Indochina."

DIA's rebuttal argues as follows in an attempt to refute CIA's assessment:

[redacted] 25X1

-- DIA has no evidence to support CIA's contention that this year's flows will exceed last year's. DIA notes that thus far this year input tonnages "are comparable" to last year's while throughput tonnages are well below those of a year ago.

-- DIA disagrees with CIA's inference that Binh Tram's reports of goal fulfillment constitute evidence that the communist supply system is reaching its goal.

The foregoing viewpoints constitute another episode in the continuous intelligence scandal of the Vietnam war:

-- CIA and DIA could both be correct. CIA may be correct that this year's tonnages will exceed last year's if they mean input tonnages. DIA also could be correct in asserting that throughput is less. It clearly is thus far. Moreover, even if input is much higher, losses to Lam Son, supplies consumed by the much-enlarged enemy force structure in South Laos, increased losses to more effective truck killing AC-130s, offsets plus losses on offsets to replace Sihanoukville, increased food shipments required to offset food requirements previously covered from Cambodia -- all these factors could yield a lower throughput than a year ago. The point is, full analysis of these statements shows them to be half truths. No single intelligence authority is responsible for putting together the entire picture. Thus we are left with no full appreciation for what we do know and do not know. Neither DIA or CIA is doing solid analysis.

-- CIA and DIA rely almost exclusively and advocate the use of the collection techniques they control -- [redacted] Neither agency compares the evidence from all sources and makes basic reliability judgements. 25X1

-- Both CIA and DIA refuse to face up to the fundamental issues. Both CIA and DIA have refused to relate supply flows to final end-use requirements: What throughput is required to support what level of enemy activity? Yet CIA will offer a statement to the effect that supply movements will allow the "hot war" to continue without ever saying what level of activity and associated supply requirement constitutes a "hot war."

I strongly believe that little will be gained by having a DIA/CIA confrontation at tomorrow's WSAG. Neither agency has provided you with a candid and comprehensive assessment of the logistics issue. Both agencies can and will defend their views successfully. This can be done because they have not ventured very far. It is easy to protect yourself with a phrase like "hot war." They should be criticized for saying too little rather than too much.

I attempt below to lay out a comprehensive analytical framework for an assessment of the situation in South Laos and the Lam Son operation. This framework encompasses two basic issues:

-- logistics
-- enemy force diversion and force destruction.

In my opinion too much attention has been given to the former and too little to the latter. They deserve at least equal weight in assessing the situation in South Laos and its impact on the war in Indo-China.

I have attempted to piece together the data I had in hand to illustrate portions of the analysis.

Logistics Benefits

We need the following evidence to assess the logistics situation:

-- (1) Supply Inputs and Throughputs for the 1970-71 Dry Season

(a) We need evidence on supply inputs broken down by week and month and into pre-Lam Son, Lam Son, and post-Lam Son time periods. These estimates should be given separately by intelligence source [redacted] etc.) and a final overall assessment provided by CIA and DIA. Evidence on the accuracy of each intelligence source should be provided. Some of this evidence is available. 25X1

Supply input to the trail system got off to a late start due to the prolongation of the wet season into October 1969. The supply input weekly average rate caught up to last year's rate in December and thereafter fairly closely paralleled last year's effort in trend and magnitude through February 1971.

Average Weekly Tons	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar(-Mar 9)	Total
1969-70*	221	2024	1660	2768	3155	2273	44,394
1970-71	184	1124	1752	2830	2812	2978	41,301

Notes: * 1969-70 input does not include tonnage shipped via Sihanoukville.

March 1971 total input of 5956 tons departs greatly from 1970 trend which was downward at 4546 tons from a February 1970 input of 12,619 tons. February 1971 input was 11,248 tons. Normally in March the Mu Gia Pass route begins to phase down. However, this year input remains higher than usual at Mu Gia Pass, indicating continued high level of input activity. Input this March at Ban Karai Pass was 1208 tons, and input at the DMZ was 1644 -- most of which it is believed is destined for enemy forces opposing the Lam Son operation.

Problems like the following would be resolved by an analysis like that outlined above.

-- This evidence would tend to support a judgment that supply inputs in 1970-71 will exceed 1969-70 levels if it is true that the late monsoon forced the enemy to start his effort about a month later this year. On the other hand, - did phase one of the offensive end a month later than phase one a year ago? Has the acceleration of the enemy's effort due to Lam Son put him back on last year's timetable?

25X1

-- Do we know enough to resolve the proportionality dispute between CIA and DIA on the relative importance of the three passes? CIA ventures a guess of equal proportionality. Is DIA's assertions that we don't know the best we can do?

(b) Evidence on throughput estimates in 1970 should also be provided broken down as described in (1) above. Serious problems underly the following series provided by DIA which shows that throughput of supplies estimated arriving at points of entry into South Vietnam and Cambodia is only 21% of the level of last year.

Throughput (RVN & Cambodia)

Weekly Avg.	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar (thru 9 Mar)	Total (9 Mar)
1969-70*	20	95	370	904	1478	984	13,507
1970-71	0	30	48	219	309	294	2,897

* Does not include tonnage arriving via Sihaoukville in 1969-70.

For this data series we need to know:

-- where these estimates come from;

-- what information is available on: supplies consumed in South Laos, supplies destroyed by bombing, and by Lam Son, supply offsets pluss losses on offsets to overcome loss of Sihanoukville, and losses to weather, etc.

-- how the series would look if it were seasonably adjusted to account for the late monsoon this year.

Such an analysis would raise problems like the following:

-- CIA may be correct in its assertion that "tonnages" (read inputs) this year will exceed last year's. But DIA could also be correct in asserting that throughput will be less.

-- Truck kills have soared this year, primarily due to the fact that we now have 12 AC-130 gunships operating as opposed to only one last year. The AC-130 gunship is credited with 70% of truck kills. It takes about 2,500 trucks to operate the trail's logistic system. At the current rate of kills, there should be a turnover of truck inventory about every three weeks. Even if we accept DIA's estimate that 75% of damaged trucks can be repaired and returned to service, the current rate of truck kills should have required a turnover of inventory three times this dry season.

Truck Kills

Weekly Avg. Truck Kills	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar (thru 9 Mar)	Total (to 9 Mar)
1969-70	20	120	148	290	311	298	4138
1970-71	7	28	193	499	643	804	7219

-- How has the loss of Sihanoukville increased the throughput (and thereby input) requirement? Does CIA's 20 ton per day estimate account for the losses the enemy would bear in South Laos?

(c) Can a special input/throughput series be designed to assess the impact of Lam Son operation, e.g., a BT32/BT34 comparison before, during and after the operation?

-- (2) Total Enemy Logistics Requirements via the Trail for Alternative Strategies/Activity Levels and the Implied Input/Throughput Requirement.

In order to assess the significance of various throughput levels we need to know what they might imply for possible enemy activity levels, e.g., protracted war, general offensive, two MR offensive. DIA and CIA have shied away from such an estimate even though they have the individual data pieces necessary to accomplish it. A useful way to calibrate the range of offensive activity would be to examine previous dry season flows before past offensives, adjust these to compare with 1970-71 Trail conditions and making alternative assumptions about stockpiles, estimate what types of military activities in 1971, the current throughput would support.

It is possible that input and throughput in 1970-71 dry season will exceed 1969-70 levels and the enemy could still fall short of meeting last year's requirement for combat. This might be the case if the 1971 increment did not offset what in the past was obtained via Sihanouville. The ultimate test of the significance of the logistics effort is not how it compares with last year's but the level of combat activity it will sustain.

-- (3) Other Logistics Evidence.

Also relevant to our overall logistics assessment is evidence on the following:

-- Individual Binh Tram reports on goal achievement and shortfalls.

-- Local logistics shortages, e.g., in MR's 1 or 2 of South Vietnam.

-- What is the significance of recent changes in manpower infiltration for the logistics estimate?

-- What is the significance of data on the expanded trail network in South Laos and the enemy's use of new roads, etc.?

-- What do data on the mix of supplies (food, POL, ammunition, etc) tell us about current logistics capabilities compared with past experience?

-- What do the enemy's efforts to defend the Trail tell us about its importance to him?

-- (4) Concluding Logistics Assessment.

With the foregoing analysis, we could move to assessments of Lam Son in which one could have some confidence. The data need to be judged against alternative logistics success criteria for Lam Son. Such criteria should include the following justifications for Lam Son:

-- It cut the aggregrate level of logistics throughput in 1971 and thereby forced the enemy to operate at a lower overall level of combat and/or to consume stockpiles.

-- The local disrupture efforts in MR 1 and 2 denied the enemy offensive opportunities this dry season.

-- The delays caused by Lam Son (and the late monsoon) caused the enemy to cancel operations in Cambodia and elsewhere because supplies did not arrive in time to begin offensive operations in the dry season.

-- The operation into South Laos forced the enemy to devote more resources that could be used elsewhere to restoring damage and expanding the Trail.

Force Division and Force Destruction Benefits

In my judgment, the strongest justification for Lam Son would rely on a force diversion/destruction rationale. Very briefly the issues are:

-- (1) Did the Lam Son Operations pre-empt a Highland's and/or MR 1 or Cambodia Offensive by diverting forces designated for such offensives? There is some evidence that had ARVN not entered Laos, enemy units there would have mounted an offensive in the highlands of MR 2. General Abrams was reported in the February 25 Washington Post to have offered such a pre-emptive justification for Lam Son.

A P. O. W. from the 64th NVA Regiment reported his unit, which entered South Vietnam in early January, was headed for the highlands to take part in an offensive. However, after arriving at Ban Dong in Laos on February 11, this unit was ordered to defend the area against ARVN attacks. A high level rallier reported in early August 1970 of enemy plans to mount a priority offensive in MR 2 against areas from which U.S. units had redeployed (the highlands) in order to take advantage of MR'2 short supply line.

We also have a report that units headed for Cambodia were held up in South Laos because of Lam Son.

In general, there is a serious question whether the enemy's roughly 35,000 combat troops in South Laos are all fully occupied for the long term. One might argue that the Laos effort was crucial if ARVN's threat was to be credible and the enemy's forces were not to be diverted to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

For a judgment on the force diversion benefits of Lam Son we need a complete OB appraisal and P. O. W., rallier and other reports on enemy intentions and movements for forces in South Laos. Most of this evidence is readily available.

-- (2) Did Lam Son disrupt the manpower infiltration effort? The enemy's 1970-71 manpower infiltrations effort has exhibited strange fluctuations. Possible these may in part be due to Lam Son which might be credited with disrupting the enemy's effort to build-up his forces for combat.

Infiltration data are readily available for such an assessment.

-- (3) ARVN and U.S. air support have hurt some NVA units badly, possibly placing them out of service for the dry season. We need to pull together the data on ARVN-inflicted casualities, losses to air strikes associated with Lam Son, [redacted] on the 25X1 status of enemy units to arrive at an assessment of the enemy units put out of commission by Lam Son.

Other Benefits and the Costs of Lam Son.

Other benefits to Lam Son that should be weighed include possible improvements in ARVN effectiveness.

Costs that must be assessed include:

-- Possible control losses in South Vietnam pursuant to ARVN diversions to Laos (thus far these appear to be slight).

-- Losses in ARVN combat effectiveness due to enemy attacks in Laos.

-- Increased NVA mobilization attributable to Lam Son.

Other more general risk/cost considerations are:

-- Risk of Chinese intervention,

-- Cost to Laotian neutralith,

-- Increased political oppisition to war in U.S.

Conclusion

An assessment of the foregoing logistics and force diversion/destruction considerations would provide a sound basis for an initial judgment on the utility of the Lam Son operation.

MEMORANDUM

E/S-HK-E330 d 3

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET

March 18, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: K. Wayne Smith KWS

SUBJECT: South Laos, Lam Son and the Indo-China War

Introduction

We have been unable to obtain the data necessary to arrive at a final assessment of the impact of the South Laos/Lam Son situation on the Indo-China war. The intelligence community is obsessed with preparing for today's WSAG and would not accomplish the analytical tasks we set out.

However, we have arrived at a very simple and solvable model for assessing the logistics situation and the impact of Lam Son. It has been informally discussed at the analyst level in CIA. CIA's analysts agree with the methdology and believe the data to solve it could be generated in a few days, if the agency and DIA are told to march in that direction. Unfortunately, CIA views itself as defending the proposition that all enemy supplies have not been cut off, whereas DIA (according to CIA) is maintaining that they have. Of course, CIA is right on this point, which, unfortunately is not fundamental.

The Model

The key issue is what new inputs into the logistics system are required to maintain last year's level of throughput given:

-- the loss of Sihanoukville. Input must increase by the annual tonnage shipped into Sihanoukville plus the POL, food, etc. increment to get this increment through -- roughly a factor of four times the ammo increment, plus the increment necessary to offset destruction by bombing of this increment.

-- new demands for non-combat consumption in 1971 vs. 1970 by additional forces in South Laos. A rough estimate is that the increase is 25%, but it could be higher.

-- new demands for combat consumption in South Laos caused by Lam Son.

-- tonnage destroyed by Lam Son. (To illustrate our data problem, while we have DIA's estimate on weapons, etc. destroyed by Lam Son, we were unable to get them to convert the item-by-item data to tonnages. They can easily do this.)

-- increased tonnage destroyed by bombing in the 1970-71 dry season as compared with 1969-70. This gets us around any arguments as to the total destroyed. We just want to know how much more this year than last. This could be estimated by taking the increased truck kills this year and multiplying by an average tonnage loss estimate per truck kill.

-- tonnage required to support NVA/KR operations in Cambodia. This is an incremental requirement over last year because the input level (onto the Trail plus Sihanoukville) last year was designed to support a protracted war strategy in South Vietnam.

If we had these estimates they would represent the additional input required in the 1970-71 dry season to support a protracted war strategy in 1971. (The variables are given in symbolic form and defined precisely at Tab A.) Such a calculation would be based on the following assumptions:

-- the enemy's planned Trail input (plus Sihanoukville) for the 1969-70 dry season was intended to support the protracted war strategy he pursued in 1970.

-- stockpiles remain unchanged. It is probably safe to say that stockpiles at the outset of the 1970-71 dry season were at minimum levels. Thus it is unlikely that the enemy could support combat activities in 1971 by running down his stockpiles. It is possible

however that he could build up his stockpiles this year. Therefore, any conclusion we draw as to the level of combat activity the 1970-71 input could support would have to be qualified to recognize the possibility that he could elect to build up his stockpiles in 1971.

-- the enemy's logistics system, outside the variables identified above, is operating at about the same level of effectiveness this year as it was last year. In other words, whatever gains the enemy has obtained from expanding his road network have been offset by improvements in our bombing (outside the gunship increment explicitly accounted for in the model), by our SGU-type operations and by the increased throughput the expanded system must support -- i.e., the load factor is the same this year as last.

I believe we can live with these assumptions. They permit us to deal only with the increments and escape major battles over bombing effectiveness, stockpiles, etc.

When we have the increment defined, it can be converted into trail days at the 1970-71 dry season input rates. Then we can say how long the enemy has to sustain his input effort to sustain a protracted war. My guess is that merely to do as well on the throughput side as he did a year ago, the enemy will need to increase his input by at least one-third.

If the increment for protracted war in 1971 is of this order of magnitude, the enemy would be hard pressed to get the supplies through by the outset of the rainy season, but if he sustains the current rate he might do it.

In the 1969-70 dry season, enemy supply input averaged 250 STPD. This year the effort in January, which began a month later than last year, was roughly 400 STPD (CIA and DIA agree on this).

These are crude assessments. We need the analysis before firm conclusions are drawn.

After we get this basic analysis, we can calculate the incremental input requirement to support strategies above protracted war, e.g., one-MR, two-MR, or Tet-style offensives. The findings might look like this:

-- the enemy can put through the supplies to support a protracted war in 1971 if he continues his current effort through the dry season at the end of April,

-- but he will not be able to build up his stockpiles for a 1972 offensive, meaning such an offensive could not be launched until April or May 1972 unless he operated the Trail in the wet season, and/or

-- the enemy cannot launch a major offensive in 1971.

Again these are illustrative conclusions, pending completion of the analysis.

Lam Son

Practically all of the incremental requirements identified at the beginning of this memorandum are attributable to Lam Son. Even the incremental consumption requirement for the enemy's added forces in South Laos has to be attributed to the threat of a Lam Son operation. Only the bombing increment and the Sihanoukville increment are not attributable to Lam Son.

Therefore, since it is the logistics throughput surplus at the margin that sustains higher activity levels, Lam Son can probably receive some credit for logistically constraining the enemy's options in 1971 and possibly in 1972 through its effect on the enemy's aggregate level of throughput.

As I pointed out in my earlier memo, however, there are other benefits to Lam Son that may be even more crucial. These are:

-- timing - the logistics flow, even if adequate in aggregate terms to support a protracted war or higher level of activity, will reach South Vietnam and Cambodia too late in the dry season to fuel the enemy's effort in what has traditionally been his period of offensive activity. Enemy activity data for 1971 to date show a decline in enemy initiated large and small scale attacks in 1971 over similiar periods in previous years.

-- local supply shortages - Lam Son would appear to have pre-empted an MR 1 or MR 2 offensive this dry season by preventing the enemy from establishing forward-based stocks in the Northern portion of South Vietnam and the adjoining Laos border,

-- force diversion/destruction - by tying down the enemy's forces in combat and putting some of his units out of commission, Lam Son has prevented the enemy from moving his units en mass from South Laos into South Vietnam for an offensive. If one buy s the evidence that the enemy planned an offensive in MR 2, which is plausible, this is a key benefit. This argument carries over into 1972, because the enemy may have to plan forces to protect the trail next year as he did this year.

These are the strongest arguments for Lam Son. Another argument is that the operation is responsible for improvements in ARVN effectiveness, if they offset the damage inflicted on ARVN's best units.

No Objection to Declassification in Part 2010/09/21 : LOC-HAK-556-6-8-0

No Objection to Declassification in Part 2010/09/21 : LOC-HAK-556-6-8-0

No Objection to Declassification in Part 2010/09/21 : LOC-HAK-556-6-8-0

WASHINGTON SPECIAL ACTIONS GROUP MEETING
March 16, 1971

Time and Place: 5:10 - 6:40 p.m., White House Situation Room

Subject: Intelligence on North Vietnamese Supply Movements

Participation:

Chairman - Henry A. Kissinger		JCS	Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt
State	Mr. U. Alexis Johnson, Ambassador William Sullivan Mr. Ray Cline	OMB	Mr. James Schlesinger
		NSC Staff	Col. Richard T. Kennedy Mr. John H. Holdridge Mr. Wayne K. Smith Mr. Keith Guthrie
Defense	Mr. David Packard Col. Harold Belles Lt. Gen. Donald V. Bennett Mr. Donald Linker		
CIA	Mr. Richard Helms Mr. George Carver		

[redacted] 25X1

* * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

SUMMARY

The WSAG received a briefing on the methodology employed in preparing intelligence estimates of supply movements along the Ho Chi Minh Trail. In the accompanying discussion, the WSAG considered the discrepancies between CIA and DIA estimates and the problems involved in comparing data from different years and in assessing the impact of the Lam Son operation on enemy supply throughput. It was agreed to hold a second WSAG meeting to discuss these topics further.

Dr. Kissinger: I may be wasting everybody's time, but I have been reading the intelligence reports from DIA and CIA about movement of supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and I am totally confused. I thought that we all ought at least to be able to leak the same facts. I want to establish a common understanding regarding what we are talking about.

Mr. Johnson: I would greatly welcome that.

Dr. Kissinger: What I thought we would do is have Dick [Helms] give his analysis, then let General Bennett provide his analysis, and finally have any other inputs that anyone else wishes to make. Then I have some questions to ask. 25X1

Mr. Helms: I would like to have [redacted] present a briefing on methodology. I asked him to visit Saigon a while back to see how the 7th Air Force goes about putting together their intelligence figures.

Dr. Kissinger: We want to know not only methodology but also the conclusions 25X1 that you draw from it.

[redacted] The Washington intelligence community is working from the same data base. Our information comes from a wide variety of sources--[redacted] In day-to-day reporting the Washington community is pretty well agreed on such things as the fact that trucks have moved up or down a particular road or that the road is in good or bad condition. Problems develop when longer term assessments are made on such matters as how much in the way of supplies actually goes through. This is where the Washington community breaks ranks.

25X1

We have been trying for a number of years to devise a system of numbers to measure throughput and input. Invariably it is a futile effort. I believe that it is not possible to come up with any reliable set of hard numbers using the existing data base. Although we understand very well how the enemy supply system works, we can't give exact figures on tonnages moved. Only the 7th Air Force produces a hard number series on tonnages. These figures are used by DIA and by the service intelligence organizations. We have strong reservations about these series. 25X1

25X1

To explain this is a bit complicated. The Air Force series relies primarily on [redacted]

25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Why don t the North Vietnamese know there are [redacted]

[redacted] They do know.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don't they pick them up?

[redacted]

25X1 Ambassador Sullivan: The answer to the question is that the [redacted] constantly being reseeded.

Mr. Packard: Most of them self-destruct.

Gen. Vogt: They are difficult to find becuase they are camouflaged. We have run tests by seeding them around one of our own airbases. Our people couldn't 25X1 find them.

[redacted] The Air Force produces three series of figures: input, BDA [bomb damage assessment], and throughput. Probably the best series is for input; we believe it comes closest to reflecting the actual flow of supplies. 25X1 Our gravest reservations are about the throughput figures.

[redacted]

Dr. Kissinger: That explains why fewer trucks are reported south of Route 922. On that basis Lam Son can't fail. 25X1

[redacted] I think so. The 7th Air Force reports only a small daily tonnage of enemy supplies going into Cambodia from Laos. We are about to publish a

study that will not provide any magic numbers but will give an idea that quite a bit of tonnage has been moved through the system.

Dr. Kissinger: Was the throughput figure last year calculated according to the same methodology used this year? There may be a real difference in supplies regardless of the defects in methodology.

Gen. Vogt: The number [redacted] is not important as long as you cover the main roads. You don't need [redacted] to assist in target location for bombing. You don't need to count the same trucks fourteen times. 25X1

[redacted] 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Why is the throughput series different from the input series? Aren't they based on the same figures?

[redacted] The techniques and data are the same. I was just pointing out the problems that arise. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: I can see why if there were weaknesses that were general throughout the system, you would want to compensate by introducing some sort of correction factor. But that doesn't explain this discrepancy. Perhaps it is in the bomb damage figures. Are these based on pilot reports?

Mr. Packard: I think the difficulty is that the BDA is a very soft figure.

Ambassador Sullivan: With regard to the question of why the throughput figures are derived independently, are [redacted] [in calculating throughput] located on the exit roads? 25X1

[redacted] Yes. 25X1

Ambassador Sullivan: Then the figure would be independent.

Dr. Kissinger: The easiest explanation is that the bomb damage data are wrong.

[redacted] Yes, but they are never corrected. 25X1

[redacted]

Gen. Bennett: What they are trying to say is that the effort to develop an 25X1 equation should be suspended.

[redacted] With regard to inter-seasonal comparisons, what the Air Force series tell us is that this year in the period from October 1 to March 10, 41,003 tons of supplies were moved. In the same dry-season period last year, the figure was 44,416 tons. Thus input has decreased 7%.

Dr. Kissinger: Was Sihanoukville open last year? Was it being used actively? Do we know the tonnages that came in through the port?

Mr. Packard: We do know that the estimated tonnage turned out to be below the figures we got from the bills of lading.

Dr. Kissinger: What was the total brought in through the port?

Gen. Vogt: Sihanouk stopped movement through the port in May 1969. He opened it again in September 1969, and it remained open until closed by Lon Nol. Of course, while the port was closed, the enemy was taking some supplies already stored in the port areas to the sanctuaries.

Dr. Kissinger: How much?

[redacted] I don't have the figures for that. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: If the figures you quoted are correct, then the enemy put 3,000 tons less into the system this year. This leaves aside the question of throughput. Whatever the amount that came through Sihanoukville, the conclusion is that last year the total input was greater by 3,000 tons plus the amount that passed through Sihanoukville.

Mr. Packard: There is another factor to be considered. The material that came through Sihanoukville was mostly ammunition and medicine. Sixty per cent of the supplies coming down the trail were food.

Dr. Kissinger: This reinforces the conclusion. The total operational input was even less this year.

[redacted] The numbers say the input decreased by 7%. Let's look at the 25X1
same set of numbers for the two dry seasons on throughput. The Air Force figures report a throughput of 2,987 tons this year and 13,526 tons last year. This is a decrease of 78%.

[redacted]

25X1 A third figure is for pipelines. The Air Force says that movement through the pipeline decreased by 75%. The Air Force makes its estimates by preparing an estimate of consumption, that is, the amount of fuel that is required to operate the enemy's fleet of trucks. We can't find that the enemy truck inventory decreased from last year to this year; yet, the Air Force estimates for the pipeline are 420 tons per week last year as compared to 105 tons per week this year. Therefore, we conclude that something must have been done to change the methodology.

25X1

Dr. Kissinger: What difference does it make?

[redacted] If the waterway and pipeline figures were to correspond to the

factors I have mentioned, the Air Force would be underestimating input by 17%. This would be the same thing as saying that input had increased, compared to last year.

Dr. Kissinger: POL all gets consumed. It makes no difference to the outcome.

[redacted] It does make a difference on how you formulate a judgment on how much can be moved through the system. 25X1

Gen. Vogt: If the destruction rate for trucks was increased 100%, fuel consumption would go down drastically.

Dr. Kissinger: Has the methodology been changed?

Gen. Bennet: No.

[redacted] Two pipelines are being used. They have a capacity of about 1000 tons per day. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: What we are interested in is throughput. If the methodology has not changed, then the enemy has found a way of masking his movements. Otherwise, why are the figures at one end of the system incompatible with those at the other end? Whatever mistakes there are in the assessments, the quantities should be uniform throughout the system. Your case should be equally devastating at both ends. Why should there be differences in the ratios of the [input and throughput] figures [for this year and last year] unless the enemy has new roads or has some way of fooling us?

[redacted] These are conceptual problems. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: But if these same problems applied last year, we should be able to accept the proposition that we can say there has been a certain percentage decrease in tonnage moved even if we don't trust the exact tonnage figures.

[redacted]

Gen. Bennett: No. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Why not?

Gen. Bennett: This is a new road. We didn't start putting [redacted] 25X1 until we had some indications that the enemy was going to start using it.

Ambassador Sullivan: Not all of these figures are from [redacted] 25X1 What about the pipeline figures? Why is there a decrease from 7800 tons to 1700 tons through the pipeline?

Mr. Johnson: Those figures are based on consumption.

Gen. Bennett: They are related to [redacted] 25X1 data on trucks. Taking the number of trucks detected in the area, we calculate the amount of fuel these trucks would use.

Ambassador Sullivan: This is input?

Gen. Bennett: Yes.

Gen. Vogt: They just take out what they need.

[redacted] 25X1 To sum up, we think that some misleading judgments have been made on how the system has operated.

Dr. Kissinger: (to General Bennett) The methodology for making the estimates has not changed?

Gen. Bennett: Basically, no.

Dr. Kissinger: Then why aren't the relative figures [for this year and last year] valid?

[redacted] 25X1 The methodology has been changed.

Dr. Kissinger: How?

[redacted] 25X1 I don't know.

Mr. Packard: The big problem is that we are looking at the figures too precisely. They may bear a relation to the actual tonnages of about two to one. They just give a general idea of the size of movements.

Dr. Kissinger: There are two possibilities. Either there has been a change in methodology, and we can therefore challenge the figures; or the methodology has not changed, and we can use the figures to indicate proportional changes.

Mr. Helms: You couldn't have put it better.

Dr. Kissinger: (to General Bennett) Has the methodology changed?

Gen. Bennett: No.

Dr. Kissinger: Then how do you explain the changes in the figures for the pipeline?

Gen. Bennett: The more the enemy uses the pipeline, the bigger the decanting space he requires at the far end. This presents problems because they want to keep the decanting area small in order not to present any targets.

Dr. Kissinger: Are these figures for actual throughput rather than maximum capacity?

Gen. Bennett: Yes. There are a number of separate items that we use in estimating what is going through the pipeline: [redacted] 25X1 observing 55-gallon drums on trucks, the absence of decanting stations.

Dr. Kissinger: How do you explain the anomaly of the enormous drop in pipeline use?

Gen. Bennett: Our figures don't show such an enormous drop.

Dr. Kissinger: It says here that this year the figure was 1700 tons, and last year, 7800 tons.

Gen. Bennett: I thought we had a higher figure.

[redacted] Last week the figure went up. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: I thought we captured the pipeline.

[redacted] There are two. One goes through the Mu Gia Pass. 25X1

Gen. Bennett: All we have done is take off one joint of the finger on the pipeline. They can still tap into it further up.

Gen. Vogt: Now they have to bring POL around [the section we have captured]. That is a tremendous inconvenience.

Dr. Kissinger: If the DIA figures [on use of the pipeline] are correct, this might be confirmation of the truck-kill figures.

Let's leave the matter of the pipeline. Has there been any change in the

methodology on throughput?

Gen. Bennett: None.

Dr. Kissinger: There are three possibilities. The enemy is masking his movements. Or he is using some route that we are not covering.

Mr. Packard: There is also the possibility that our methodology is off base in the first place. That is, that we don't know what we are doing.

Dr. Kissinger: I still think we can make comparisons. We can try to establish the proportional change.

Gen. Bennett: There is a new type of North Vietnamese force in that area [southern Laos]. This force is using up ordnance, gasoline, and food.

Dr. Kissinger: It can't use up gasoline. There isn't any coming down the pipeline.

Gen. Vogt: It is coming down the pipeline. What they use depends on what they need.

Mr. Johnson: This figure for the pipeline is not estimated input?

[redacted] It is an estimate of the input into the system. The pipeline estimates are based on the assumption that if they need 60 tons per day they will move that much through the pipeline. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Why can we not use this data to establish proportionality?

Mr. Packard: The methodology is no good.

Dr. Kissinger: It is your bloody methodology. You mean it is not even good enough to give us a proportional estimate.

Mr. Packard: That's right.

Mr. Johnson: The pipeline is not important. What is important is the throughput--how much is delivered at the other end.

Dr. Kissinger: That is the point of my question.

[redacted] During the first four weeks of this dry season the pipeline input was zero. 25X1

Ambassador Sullivan: How was that figure obtained?

[redacted] I don't know. 25X1

Mr. Johnson: What is the CIA judgment on all of this?

[redacted] That the throughput was at least as high this year as last year. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: What is the evidence? (to Packard) Is the whole of Pentagon intelligence useless on this?

Mr. Packard: I don't think you can say more than that the input was up roughly 10-20%.

Mr. Johnson: What about throughput?

Mr. Packard: I think it was lower. The truck-kill has been higher.

Gen. Vogt: The consumption in Laos is high.

Mr. Johnson: CIA doesn't agree. Why?

[redacted] 25X1

25X1

[redacted]

Dr. Kissinger: What votes are you waiting for? Why can't you make a judgment on the basis of what happened in February?

25X1

[redacted]

Gen. Vogt: They had to support six regiments further down. Do we have reports on the binh trams further south.

[redacted]

25X1

Dr. Kissinger: How are the regiments south of Route 9 being supplied?

[redacted] Our judgment is that the bulk of the supplies are moving south. 25X1

Gen. Bennett: You mentioned a movement of 3900-4600 tons, or about 160 tons per day through Binh Tram 32 northwest of Tchepone. During the same period the input was 479 tons per day. This would indicate a fair degree of interference with the flow of supplies. This puts the comint data in the proper perspective.

[redacted] 25X1

Mr. Johnson: How about [redacted] south of Lam Son?

[redacted] show an increase.

Dr. Kissinger: That can't be right.

[redacted] 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Does that cover all [redacted] readings in the system?

[redacted] All those on the exit routes. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Then where do we get the low throughput figure we were discussing before?

Gen. Vogt: That was our figure.

[redacted] 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Do we have throughput [redacted] for last year to correspond to these?

[redacted] For the two four-week periods they are 3928 and 5700. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: This confirms what they are saying [about a decrease in throughput] compared to last year.

[redacted] It says that the throughput is less than last year, but that it has increased since Lam Son. 25X1

Mr. Packard: We don't argue that. It is certainly true that the ARVN didn t get over there far enough. The point is that throughput is lower this year than last year.

Dr. Kissinger: That s right. This supports the conclusion that there has been a decrease, which has been roughly proportional to the tonnage figures

Mr. Packard: I think there is ample evidence that the throughput is lower. They probably were able to step up their supply movements before our forces got to Tchepone. That doesn t mean the operation was a failure. In addition, there have been lots of truck kills.

Dr. Kissinger: There are two separate questions. One is whether there was lower throughput than last year. The other is what is the cause. Was it the result of Lam Son? I don t see how you can prove that it was. Where do we measure throughput?

Gen. Bennett: Input is measured at three points where the trails cross the mountains into southern Laos. Throughput is measured at six points down below.

Dr. Kissinger: Why don t we let [redacted] finish? Then we can let General Bennett say what he wants. And then we will need another session to discuss this. 25X1

25X1 [redacted]

Dr. Kissinger: How do you conclude that?

[redacted] 25X1

Mr. Packard: The figures for waterway movements are very questionable. Last year they had no reason to use the waterways. This year they have more incentive.

Mr. Sullivan: Is this figure for input via the waterways in the north?

Gen. Bennett: Yes. It is the amount that has gone down from up north.

[redacted] One last point. We can't yet make a final judgment on the logistical impact of Lam Son. All the indicators say that the traffic flow has been disrupted since the start of the operation. The enemy has had to change to less satisfactory routes, which provide him less jungle canopy. Whatever the amount of supplies he moves, he will fall short of his goal--which was to move the amount that was formerly transported both via the Ho Chi Minh Trail and through Sihanoukville. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: General Bennett.

Gen. Bennett: You have to look at two areas--the input and the output areas. The input and throughput figures come from these areas. The [redacted] are not required to measure throughput and input. Th[redacted] 25X1 for measuring input are at three passes: Mu Gia, Ban Karai, and one other. There is a smaller movement along the waterways.

Dr. Kissinger: How do you answer the Secretary s [Packard s] point that there is now more incentive for the enemy to use the waterways?

Mr. Packard: We are talking about different waterways.

Gen. Bennett: They moved 40 tons per day last year on the waterways. This year they have moved less. Last year they were sending waterproof stuff, such as POL in drums. They have found they don't need to do that this year.

There are alleged defects [redacted] at the exits. This 25X1 involves the question of how [redacted] responds to changes in enemy supply routes. Just because the enemy is working on Route 97 doesn't mean there has been a massive flow of supplies along it. We are continuing to watch the lateral roads and will seed them if there is any activity. The basic point is to look at the system at two points--where the input and throughput [redacted] The tactical 25X1 [redacted] in the center area. We try to check [redacted] against 25X1 all other sources and use the latter to adjust the [redacted].

Dr. Kissinger: How do you explain that the 165-ton-per-day movement south of Lam Son doesn t show up in the throughput data?

Gen. Bennett: Those supplies must have been used up by the combat forces moved into the area.

Dr. Kissinger: You two [redacted] and Bennett] agree that 165 tons per [redacted] 25X1 were moved south of Lam Son in February.

Gen. Bennett: We have no quarrel on that score.

Dr. Kissinger: The only question is whether those supplies were consumed or left there.

Mr. Packard: How much do you figure one of those regiments would use?

[redacted] It is difficult to estimate right now because the battle is continuing. Before Lam Son, I would say about 125 tons per day. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: Do you think there could have been a significant increment to the 165 tons per day through some other area?

[redacted] I don't know how significant an increment there could have been. 25X1

Dr. Kissinger: We need to have another session, now that we have covered the methodology.

Mr. Cline: As a neutral observer, could I make an observation? One reason why you might not be able to use the figures to measure proportional change from last year to this year is that, as Mr. Packard said, the totals are made of individual calculations, some of which may be off by a factor of two. The cumulative error could be great, since individual errors might not cancel out.